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ART. VI. — CRITICAL NOTICES.

1. — *The Rise of the Republic of the United States.* By RICHARD FROTHINGHAM. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company. 1872.

IF the people of the United States were more familiar with the history of their own country, and understood better the conditions under which republican government has succeeded with them so remarkably, we should hear less of that political school which sees in Napoleonism the only cure for the vices of our system; and, on the other hand, should be less eager to extend our national congratulations whenever, among the various phases of anarchy in any quarter of the globe, the republican is for a moment uppermost. A thorough understanding of those conditions is indispensable indeed, if we are to deal successfully with the political questions which arise in the administration of our government; and to such an understanding Mr. Frothingham's book is a valuable contribution.

He has aimed to separate from the general history of the country that part which concerns its political development. Taking the colonists as they were when they landed, with the ideas of political science which they brought from Europe, he has sought to show how those ideas were moulded by the necessities of their life here, and how they were gradually developed till they became the "glittering generalities" of the Declaration. The book is a history of the education by which the people of the Colonies were fitted to undertake the responsibilities of self-government. But it is not a philosophical history. The reader will find in it little original thought, and the abundance of authority which Mr. Frothingham cites to sustain his simplest propositions almost seems to indicate a dread of originality. It is, in fact, a compendium of American political literature, a digest of state papers, resolutions of public bodies, the correspondence of leading men, addresses, speeches, and newspaper articles, so arranged with reference to the public events which called them forth as to present an accurate view of public opinion on political questions, and its gradual changes during the century and a half before the adoption of the Constitution. The author's industrious research is conspicuous on every page. He has spared no pains to make his record of opinion complete, and the result is a very valuable book of reference; but it can hardly be called an entertaining history. Perhaps this ought not to be expected when we consider the nature of the subject. To give a perfect idea of public sentiment at a given time in thirteen colonies, it may be necessary to print thirteen

sets of resolutions in as many popular assemblies; but when those assemblies were unanimous, when in fact the first set of resolutions served as a model for the other twelve, none but an enthusiast on the subject of resolutions can enjoy reading the series consecutively.

We cannot but think, however, that Mr. Frothingham's treatment of his subject is unnecessarily dry. He contents himself with results, and deals too little with causes and processes. His method is to give an important event which exercised an influence on public opinion, and then tell us how the colonists expressed themselves about it. Such a measure of Lord North's ministry led to the passage of such and such resolutions: the measure is described simply, the resolutions are given verbatim. The coloring of the picture is wanting. We are told that the colonists thought thus and thus; but all the thousand influences which led them to take this position, derived from their traditions, their situation, and their habits of life, are neglected. Man has another than the resolution-passing side, to which the author gives little thought. This is particularly noticeable when he discusses the idea of local self-government. He is inclined to believe that the colonists, in forming their system, were guided by traditions of their rights as freemen, handed down from their Germanic ancestors, and kept alive by the Saxons. Undoubtedly, the national characteristics of the emigrants had much to do with the government they formed. A body of Asiatics certainly, a body of Frenchmen or Spaniards probably, would not have adopted the same system; but it was not considerations of abstract right, but the practical exigencies of their position which determined their action. They governed themselves amid the perils and hardships of their new situation as men do on a sinking ship, or in the presence of any common danger, thinking less of their rights than of their necessities, — so few in number that the counsel of every man was necessary in deciding how they should avoid famine and extermination. The author does not bring out as he might have done the influence which the physical situation of the colonies, their isolation, the differences in race, faith, and purpose between them, the neglect which they suffered from England till they had become too valuable to be overlooked, must have exercised on their form of government. The circumstances of their settlement made them separate states; they became one nation when they were united by a common purpose and a common danger.

The book, though not likely to interest the general reader, will well repay the study of any one who cares to understand the causes which insured the success of republican government in this country. It is not every people which is capable of self-government. Why one nation is, and another is not, what conditions must exist to make a

republic possible, are questions which no American can afford to neglect, and which have a peculiar interest now when the oldest monarchies of Europe are seeking to become republics. Certain advantages the colonists had which cannot fail to strike the reader, and a little thought will enable him to see how the absence of any one would have rendered the success of our Revolution impossible. Nothing is more remarkable in the character of our ancestors than their inherent respect for law as law, which on the one hand enabled them to present a united front of resistance to the measures of the English ministry, even when, like the Tea Act, directly beneficial, because those measures were the assertion of a right whose existence they denied; and on the other dictated that dignified forbearance from all riotous disturbance, which not even the sufferings of Boston under the operation of the Port Bill or the presence of hostile soldiers among them could drive its people to forget. This jealous regard for principles rendered vain all efforts of the crown to divide the colonies by concessions made to them individually, without yielding the claim of right in dispute. Nor can it be doubted that, if the popular cause had been disgraced by exhibitions of mob violence or premature outbreaks of resistance, the necessary union would never have been attained, and the repressive measures of the ministry would have been justified in the eyes of the world.

Nor is the willingness to sacrifice individual advantage and individual opinion for the common good a less indispensable condition of a republic; and this spirit of self-sacrifice possessed our fathers to a wonderful extent. Unless this had been present, how could thirteen colonies, in some cases almost at swords' points with each other, have consented to waive the matters in dispute, and have agreed for seven years of hardship to obey the commands of a Congress which had no power to enforce them? Nothing but the existence of a common purpose of no ordinary intensity would have rendered this government of purely moral force possible; and the existence of such a common purpose is another essential condition of a republic.

Lastly, it is impossible to overrate the influence of tradition. It is interesting to see how old the ideas and some at least of the phrases in the Declaration of Independence were, and how, in slightly varied language, they had appeared over and over again, and it is curious to trace the origin and gradual development of those theories of government which were embodied in the Constitution. Republican government was no experiment in this country when its independence was declared. The experiment had succeeded for a century and a half. The method adopted for harmonizing the conflicting jurisdictions of state and nation was, perhaps, an experiment; but the fundamental idea of self-government was rooted in the very natures of the people.

No one can read Mr. Frothingham's history without seeing how each of these conditions — the respect for law as law; the willingness to sacrifice private advantage for the general good; the common purpose; and the influence of tradition — was essential to our success, and how impossible it would have been in the absence of either to have maintained the necessary union. It is equally obvious that in neither France nor Spain do these conditions exist to-day; and with the recollections of the Commune still fresh, one may be pardoned for doubting whether they ever will. To compare the prospects of the French and Spanish republics with our own would require more space than we can give; but one essential difference may be pointed out in a few words. In America the idea of an imperial government, or of any but a republican, is so foreign to all the traditions of our people that it could not live an hour. The popular leader who should attempt to subvert our system would find himself alone against the country. In France and Spain the possibility of a *coup d'état* is always present, to the leaders of faction as a recognized move in the game of politics, to the people as something inevitable. Hence, when it happens, it meets with acquiescence, because it is just what everybody expected. The Imperialists among us overlook that difference. Where a revolution is always expected, no government can be stable, for revolution is always the resort of the disaffected. Hence, we can hardly hope for the permanence of the new republics, or expect that the form of government will cure vices which are inherent in the characters of the governed. Nor is such a comparison a mere matter of speculative interest. The questions presented by those countries are questions which we must understand in order to meet the issues of our own politics during the next half-century. If we are satisfied that the republics in France and Spain have little or no chance of success, what must we think of the prospect for such a government in the countries adjoining our own, over which we shall be asked to extend our system before many years? Can we safely admit those to share in governing us who not only have never been able to govern themselves, but have shown an utter incapacity to be governed by any system? We may well pause and be sure that the respect for law in our own people, upon whose existence our continued success depends, has not been perceptibly weakened, before we admit to participation in our government other peoples who know no higher law than force. From the Secretary of the Treasury down to James Fiske, Jr. and David Dudley Field, there seems a growing tendency to disregard the law in the pursuit of ends which seem desirable, whether those ends be the moving of the crops or the plunder of a rich corporation. That the law should be violated is of comparatively trifling

importance; but that the intentional violation should be condoned, if done with no bad motive; is a principle pregnant with evil, and one which Congress, by approving Mr. Boutwell's course in negotiating the recent loan at a higher rate than that fixed by law, seems to have sanctioned; and their action shows the dangerous tendency against which it behooves us to struggle. Nothing but the same jealous watchfulness against encroachments wrong in principle, even though in effect beneficial, which carried our fathers successfully through their contest for self-government, will enable us to maintain their work; and a constant recurrence to their writings will tend to stimulate our care.

There is one feature of Mr. Frothingham's book which is very annoying to the reader, though it does not injure its value as a book of reference. This is his habit of repeating his text in notes, of giving some quotation more or less at length, and then, in a note which contains the reference to his authority, repeating the same language, with, perhaps, some additions. The simple reference to his authority would seem to have been enough.

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2. — *Myths and Myth-Makers: Old Tales and Superstitions interpreted by Comparative Mythology*. By JOHN FISKE, M. A., LL. B., Assistant Librarian and late Lecturer on Philosophy, at Harvard University. Boston: James R. Osgood and Company. 1873.

MR. FISKE has done the public good service by collecting in a volume of convenient size these various essays which embody the latest results of modern scholarship in regard to the many myths and superstitions that have come down to us from a remote antiquity, together with many ingenious remarks of his own. Most of them had appeared last year in the *Atlantic Monthly*, where they had aroused very general interest in this fascinating subject. Almost all the authorities from which Mr. Fiske quotes will be found entertaining reading, but their number, and very often their size, and the philological reasoning on which they are based, combine to make them less attractive to those readers who instinctively and naturally enough shrink from whatever bears a likeness to a scientific book. Such persons, however, need not fear being dragged into too deep water in the volume before us. Mr. Fiske has been through all that is arid in the work of investigation, and gives us simply the results of his study in a most agreeable form. This he has done without sacrificing accuracy to smoothness; his book can be read with perfect confidence by those who have not the time to look up the various matters for themselves. He has the rare merit of avoiding both error and dulness.